

critical digest

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T. M. KRAUS

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New York Theatre Diary

Richard III- City Center 12/9/53. Third Jose Ferrer production features Ferrer in title role of Shakespeare historical play with Florence Reed, Maureen Stapleton, and Jessie Royce Landis featured...John Murray Anderson's Almanac-Imperial 12/10/53 Michael Grace, Stanley Gilkey and Harry Rigby present revue marking American debut of British comedienne Hermione Gingold. Harry Belafonte, Polly Bergen, Orson Bean Nanci Crompton and Carleton Carpenter are also featured. Richard Adler and Jerry Ross contributed much of the music and lyrics

NYC Newspaper Strike Continues

6 NYC newspapers- Times, News, Mirror, Post, Journal American, and World Telegram & Sun- entered second week of strike by photo engravers. Picket lines halted other newspaper workers from their regular activities. The Herald Tribune resumed publication of an 8 page ad-less paper after skipping 5 days. "CD" will cover theatre news and available reviews and comments with the cooperation of critics and press agents.

Current Theatre Reviews

Madam Will You Walk- Phoenix 12/1/53. First 4 week production at the new theatre enterprise located at 12th St and 2nd Ave won unanimous "pro" notices from those filed. Jessica Tandy and Hume Cronyn won top adjectives for performances in the production of Sidney Howard's 1939 humorous fantasy. Several critics thought that play might not be a hit uptown, but was just perfect for the popular priced house. Kerr, Herald Tribune, noted that at its best it is urbane, gaily good-humored and civilized, an interesting reflection of an interesting mind. United Press' Gaver said that well acted drama has unusual twist to devil's tale. Associated Press' Baron predicted show would move to Broadway. Dash, Women's Wear, rated it a rich, challenging fantasy. Atkinson, Times, told "CD" that he found it a very pleasant evening, while Coleman, Mirror, told "CD" that it was interesting, but uneven in spots. Sole "con" words filed by Cooke, Wall St. Journal, who feared it was a not too interesting embroidery upon the Faust theme. Additional "pro" notices were filed by Eaton, Press, Sheaffer, Eagle, Colby, Journal of Commerce, Field, Newark News, Bolton, Morning Telegraph, International News Service's Barrington, and Beaufort, Christian Science Monitor.

Kismet- Ziegfeld 12/3/53. Lavish musical production of Charles Lederer presenting Edwin Lester's production of a new musical based on the 1911 spectacle of the same name won a majority of rave notices from those filed. Sets, costumes, dances, won highest praise from all. Starring Alfred Drake and Doretta Morrow, the cast was roundly applauded. Kerr, Herald Tribune, noted that the show was strictly commercial entertainment which has everything but any particular intergrity. Voicing a dissenting view he labeled it as the sort of show that would sell its soul for a joke, and the jokes should be better at the price. While authors were listed as fairly conscienceless concerning Borodin's original score. Dash Women's Wear enjoyed the colorful musical. Sheaffer, Eagle, is sure there is more than enough material and fun for two shows. United Press' Gaver loved the old fashioned theatrical gusto. AP's Baron tabbed it as an enchanted evening. Coleman, Mirror, told "CD" that show was a hit, containing the real theatrical vitality the NY theatre needs.

' Off Broadway '

Pulitzer Prize committee has visited the Circle in Square American Gothic... Modern American Theatre is casting Bullfight, the new play by Leslie Stevens which will be presented at Theatre de Lys Jan 12...Dobbs Ferry, NY, Playhouse is presenting Rope...Madame Savart is current bill at Provincetown Playhouse...Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles, Shaw's comedy, continues at Davenport, Lr. & 27th St...Ken Parker will present his play A Cat Has Nine at Royal Theatre, 83 E 4 starting Dec 11.

' Theatre TV Notes '

Rex Harrison and Lilli Palmer are featured in ABC TV US Steel Hour production of The Man in Possession, a London hit comedy, on Dec 8...Maurice Evans 2 hour production of Hamlet Jan 24 on NBC TV Hall of Fame will be directed by George Schaefer...Ben Gazzara, End As A Man, was featured on NBC TV "Man of Year" program...NBC TV "Excursion" considered difficulties of becoming an actor.

' Broadway TV Theatre '

Your Uncle Dudley, the little theatre favorite, will be presented on WOR TV Broadway TV Theatre Dec 7-11 with Edward Everett Horton and Marjorie Gateson. Show by Howard Lindsay and Bertrand Robinson opened originally at the Cort theatre on Nov 18, 1929 with Walter Connolly, Beatrice Terry and Mrs. Jacques Martin. It ran 96 performances. It was one of 4 openings that night, the others being The Ledge, A Primer for Lovers, and Robin Hood.

All but 2 of the daily critics filed mild pro reviews for the home-spun comedy, the second comedy effort of the team of Lindsay and Robinson. Atkinson, Times, okayed for a random evening's entertainment. Hammond, Herald Tribune, found it full of chuckles, though some of play he considered in bad taste. But Gabriel, American, and Littell, World, called it an unfunny waste of fine actors.

' Theatre Book Comments '

"The Haunted Heroes of Eugene O'Neill" by Ewin Engel (Harvard) is an earnest, comprehensive, but forbidding volume of criticism, notes Dupee, Times. Book does show, at length, how literate and aware the playwright was.

"Daniel Blum's Theatre World 1952-53" (Greerberg) highly recommended by Hob, Variety, and Rice, Post. Tradepaper mugg tabbed it a natural for any incurable stage addict, while Post drama editor finds the series a way of making seasons seem much better than they were.

"Vaudeville" by Joe Laurie, jr (Henry Holt) okayed by Maney, Herald Tribune, and Burr, Playbill. Press agent, turned book reviewer, labeled book a must for those who feel that the passing of vaudeville left a gap in their amusement life. While Burr thought it provides a needed, if slightly sketchy, history of a once important branch of show business.

' Theatre Record Comments '

Old Vic performances of Murder In The Cathedral (Angel Records) and Romeo and Juliet recommended by Saturday Review critics. Edman, SHL, rated the Eliot play via records as superb. Robert Helpmann, Robert Donat aid in providing a singularly commanding performance of one of the few genuinely effective poetic dramas of our time. Kauffmann, SHL, saluted Claire Bloom in the lead of the Shakespeare play. She is temperamentally and vocally exactly right for Juliet.

' Review Reports '

Analysis of NYC daily, weekly reviews. Theatre, films, LP records. \$1 per back title. Send check, money order. CRITICAL DIGEST, 505-Fifth Ave, NYC 17.

' Green Room Department '

O'NEILL OBITS...In Eugene O'Neill's death, all people have suffered a serious loss, notes Herald Tribune editorial. The occasion is one for lament. He saw man according to his own lights, not with foolish optimism, but rather with an artist's eye of dignity and truth...Time magazine listed O'Neill as the greatest playwright in US history. His name, once a clarion call, threatened to be drowned out by the tinny trumpets of lesser men. Yet Americans had reason to remember him with respect and gratitude. Before O'Neill, the US had theatre, the magazine article states, but after O'Neill, it had drama.

LONDON-NY ROUTE...Recent failure of Escapade considered by Nathan, Journal American, and Sheaffer, Eagle. Former finds the most difficult aspect the occasional incomprehensible endorsement by British critics of British plays that are bad by any standards, English or American. While Latter reminds that theatre going in London is more genial, leisurely, and has a more relaxed tempo. Thus, he believes, audiences are more sympathetic to a talky play.

COLUMN TIPS...Shuberts will rename one of their houses the O'Neill Theatre, predicts Eaton...O'Neill left his unproduced play A Touch of Poet to be edited and directed by Josh Logan, reports Lyons...A Broadway actor asked Wilson to soft pedal the news that he is a nudist because he fears it may harm his bid for US citizenship.

PRESS AGENTS ON MOVE...The theatre's press agents did a little house moving within the past ten days. Bill Doll has shifted to an ante-room of the Vanderbilt, William Fields, Barry Hyams and Jack Toohey have all moved into the 1545 Broadway building. While Karl Bernstein recently moved to 1694 Broadway.

CRITICAL THOUGHTS...Theatre audiences today, judges Clurman, Nation, have a greater appetite for sugar than at any time since 1917...Whatever became of Chester Erskine, asks Variety...Plays run longer today, sums up Morehouse, World Telegram & Sun, after discovering that the original Kismet spectacle play in 1911 ran only 184 performances...You can't be sued for wanting to be an actor, but you can certainly prove that you haven't much sense by wanting to be an actor, warns Bolton, Morning Telegraph.

INTERVIEW HI-LITES...If such a play as the recent Billy Budd could have been produced at \$15,000 instead of \$100,000, they could have had a life, Norris Houghton, co-producer of Phoenix Theatre told Rice, Post. He firmly hopes that his theatre at 12th St and 2nd Ave, now showing Madam Will You Walk for a limited 4 week run with Jessica Tandy and Hume Cronyn will give life to actors, directors, designers as well. The producers want to provide a climate in which they can work.

' Pros & Cons by TMK '

Kismet producers and press agents performed a near miracle which may have an important effect on the handling of future advertising and promotion in the theatre. With NYC dailies on strike they concentrated their efforts on radio & TV. The result was, without the aid of any rave reviews from any daily, a line formed at the Ziegfeld by 10 AM. Thus another myth of the NY theatre has been exploded: Imagination, ingenuity, advertising money, and a good show equal a set of rave notices.

' "CD" Coupon '

THEATRE NEWSLETTER- weekly digests NYC theatre news, reviews, comments. Ticket, critics reports. Drama books, records. Year round features. Ideal gift for "Stage-struck" fans, students, etc. \$10 year. \$12.50 foreign, \$25 for 3 years includes free Merman-Martin LP disc. Compiled by Broadway in Brief columnist

Name.....

Address.....

"What Can TV Bring to the Theatre" was the question "Drama Desk", the NY Theatre reporters and editors organization asked 4 young men from TV. Horton Foote, author of A Trip to Bountiful, Vincent Donahue, director of the show, George Axelrod, author of Seven Year Itch, and Howard Teichmann, co-author of Solid Gold Cadillac agreed that from an artistic standpoint TV can bring nothing to the legitimate theatre. The most it can do at present is to give employment to theatre workers until they can support themselves in the theatre.

To the comedy writer, Axelrod pointed out, TV provides audiences to test jokes which enables him to learn to write professionally. Actually TV couldn't exist without the theatre, Foote reminded. He has found out that with theatre people in charge of a TV production it can be wonderful. While Teichman noted that it is too early to expect TV to contribute anything to theatre. In 25 years of radio only narration and electronic sound-effects have been adopted by the stage. TV may serve a useful purpose to the theatre, Teichman added, if it can bring more theatre to NY.

Plays

Flame-Out, the new Alan Mowbray play about jet pilots in Korea, which was to have opened Tuesday, December 8 at the Lyceum, has cancelled its NY opening. The play, which received poor out of town notices, folded in Washington after a prior showing in New Haven...A Trip to Bountiful closed, while End As A Man has reached 100th perf... Teahouse of the August Moon is in the black after only 6½ weeks...South Pacific is hunting for a new house after Jan 16 when Roland Petit's Ballet de Paris opens at the Broadway...Betty Hutton will play in John Golden's production of Seventh Heaven...Dear Charles, the Playwrights production featuring Anabella opens its tour in Hartford Dec 30, will open in NY Jan 21 at a theatre to be named...Ondine, Playwrights production with Audrey Hepburn and Mel Ferrer, will start rehearsals Dec 26 and open in NY in mid- January at the 46th St. Theatre...Sing Till Tomorrow, the new Jean Lowenthal play with John Marley and Michael Sheehan started rehearsals this week, and is planning for a Dec 29 opening...A Girl Can Tell will play Sunday night performances Dec 20 and 27, instead of Christmas and New Year's nights.

People

Alan Dent, London News Chronicle critic, will be guest of honor at NY Drama Critics' Circle luncheon Dec 15 at the Algonquin Hotel...James Mason will appear at next summer's Stratford, Ontario, Canada Shakespeare Festival in Measure for Measure and Oedipus Rex...Abe Burrows, co-author of Guys and Dolls, appeared onstage at the NY closing of hit musical...Abner Klipstein, press agent for Wish You Were Here, took a dive into the show's onstage pool closing night...Carol Channing will appear in a musical version of Samson and Delilah called Delilah.

Tune WNBC(NYC) Ben Grauer 7 30 AM Day After Opening. "CD" prepares brief quotes reviews

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